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151009Z Nov 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004586

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/15/2015

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SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION SCENESETTER: MIAOLI COUNTY

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

1. (C) Summary: In the complicated race for Miaoli County Magistrate, Kuomintang (KMT) Legislator Liu Cheng-hung, a Taiwanese, faces two main Hakka opponents: DPP candidate Chiu Ping-kun and People First Party (PFP) Legislator Hsu Yao-chang, who is running as an independent. While all polls show Liu leading, the undecided vote is quite large and it is not clear whether Liu's being Taiwanese rather than Hakka will influence the outcome of the election in a county that has a strong Hakka majority and that has always had a Hakka magistrate. The KMT categorizes Miaoli as a target county important to win in the run up to the 2008 presidential election. Current Magistrate Fu Hsueh-peng is an independent and he has endorsed DPP candidate Chiu in an effort to obtain support from the DPP-controlled central government and possibly a position for himself. End Summary.

2. (SBU) The race for Miaoli County magistrate is complicated by factional competition and personal rivalry and by the county's geographic and ethnic diversity. Traditionally in Taiwan, the Hakka and the Taiwanese (from southern Fujian) have not always gotten along well together, with the Hakka banding together to protect their interests against the Taiwanese. The approximately 30 percent Taiwanese population in Miaoli is concentrated in the coastal area, while the 65 percent Hakka mostly live in the interior area of the county. Three of the six candidates for county magistrate are competitive. Current Magistrate Fu Hsueh-peng, an independent, is supporting the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate, Miaoli Mayor Chiu Ping-kun. Chiu left the Kuomintang (KMT) to run under the DPP banner after losing the KMT nomination to KMT Legislator Liu Cheng-hung. The third candidate is People First Party (PFP) Legislator Hsu Yao-chang, who is running as an independent. Chiu and Hsu are Hakka, while Liu is Taiwanese. Traditionally, the Miaoli magistrate has always been a Hakka. All of the public opinion polls conducted by the media show Liu leading, Chiu second, and Hsu third, with a large undecided vote. In Miaoli, AIT's contacts say, personal reputation and connections, ethnicity, and local factions can be more important factors in elections than political party.

3. (C) DPP Miaoli party chief Hsu Chin-jung told AIT that independent Magistrate Fu Hsueh-peng decided to support the DPP in this election because he believes that only a magistrate from the ruling DPP will receive central government support and be able to deliver on his campaign promises. (Note: Press reporting has suggested that Fu's support for the DPP was tied to an offer by President Chen of a future position for Fu in the central government in return for endorsing the DPP candidate. End Note.) Acknowledging that Chiu is currently behind Liu in public opinion polls, Hsu predicted that Chiu will be able to close a gap of up to ten percent in the final stages of the campaign, as DPP candidates often do, and win the election. Hsu provided a detailed breakdown on expected support for Chiu, predicting that Chiu will receive fifty percent of the Taiwanese vote and noting the importance of votes to be mobilized by Magistrate Fu. Because Chiu was "blue," even "deep blue," he noted, some people may have trouble supporting him as a "green" candidate. DPP chief Hsu charged independent candidate Hsu Yao-chang with publicizing a "false" poll by a university professor that showed Hsu ahead of Chiu for second place in the race. According to an internal DPP poll conducted on October 28-29 and subsequently published in the local press, Hsu Chin-jung told AIT, support for Liu is 23.8 percent, Chiu 16.7 percent, Hsu 10.2 percent, and the undecided are 49.3 percent.

4. (C) KMT Miaoli party chief Lee Chin-sung predicted to AIT that Liu Cheng-hung will win by a small number of votes, the main uncertain factor being how the ethnic issue will play out in the campaign's final days. Lee suggested that the Hakka vote will split one-third each for the three main candidates, and that Liu's votes will be boosted by the Taiwanese vote and support from the two local factions (the Liu faction and part of the Huang faction) as well as the strong local KMT organization. Before nominating Liu, the KMT conducted a poll and found that most voters do not care

if their next magistrate is Taiwanese, with only a small minority insisting that the magistrate be Hakka, Lee said. The KMT's analysis also shows that a majority of undecided voters in Miaoli are pan-Blue supporters. According to Lee, the Hakka identify with China and not just with Taiwan. They do not support the DPP, which they view as a Taiwanese party with an independence ideology, he added. The KMT has designated Miaoli as a target county in this election, Lee explained. KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou has brought hope to the party, He said, and a victory by Liu in Miaoli will be important for the KMT chances in the 2008 presidential election. (Note: The KMT is playing up Ma Ying-jeou in campaign posters that show Ma with his arm around Liu's shoulders. End Note.)

15. (C) Liu Chan-lang, campaign manager for independent candidate and PFP member Hsu Yao-chang, told AIT that Hsu decided to run because the KMT did not respect Miaoli tradition and insisted on nominating a Taiwanese, adding that Hsu decided to run as an independent because he wants to be the magistrate for all the people and not just for one political party. Based on a recent poll conducted by one of Hsu's university professors, Liu claimed that Hsu is now in second place in the race, ahead of DPP candidate Chiu, and he said Hsu hopes to win the election by capturing most of the votes from the Hakka and Mainlander communities, civil servants, teachers, state-owned enterprise employees, and the police. Liu also suggested to AIT that the growing role of parties in Miaoli politics is a negative trend that will increase ethnic competition between the Hakka and Taiwanese in coming years, especially after the Legislative Yuan is restructured in 2007.

Comment

16. (C) There are many uncertainties in the Miaoli election: Can the KMT's Liu, a Taiwanese, attract undecided Hakka voters? Will a split in the Hakka vote between Chiu, Hsu, and the three other Hakka candidates help elect Liu? Will Chiu, who just defected from the KMT, be successful in mobilizing Taiwanese DPP supporters and the Hakka community? These and other complex factors make the Miaoli election interesting to watch and difficult to predict.
Paal